

Fact Sheet

Fact Sheet → Childhood Obesity

Prevalence of Childhood Obesity

- One in five U.S. children is overweight or obese.*
- Obesity is a chronic disease and is the most prevalent nutritional disease of children and adolescents.
- Childhood obesity has doubled in the past 20 years and currently affects 10 million children.
- *Rates of obesity among children in South Carolina have not been determined yet due to lack of data.*

Role of Childhood Obesity in Adult Obesity

- Targeting obesity in childhood can impact and prevent adult obesity.
- 80% of obese children become obese adults. The risk for adult obesity increases with level of childhood obesity.
- Weight loss during childhood can be maintained into adulthood.

Link of Obesity to Environmental Factors

- The more than 200% increase in obesity in the past 15 years clearly reflects environmental rather than genetic factors.
- Behavioral factors (physical activity and diet) are modifiable and logical targets for intervention.

* Classification of obesity is commonly based on Body Mass Index (BMI) which adjusts body weight for height. A BMI greater than the 85th percentile is classified as overweight while a BMI greater than the 95th percentile is considered obese for children of the same age and gender.

Consequences of Childhood Obesity

- The following medical factors are associated with obesity: unfavorable blood lipid levels, high blood pressure, diabetes, asthma, and early maturation.
- The major sources of health complications in obese children include sleep apnea, Type 2 diabetes and orthopedic complications.
- The most serious and prevalent long-term consequences include mental health problems such as depression, lower self-esteem, and discrimination by peers, family, and teachers.

Prevention and Management of Childhood Obesity

- Parental obesity is the single most important predictor of childhood obesity; therefore, family based therapy is recommended. Usual treatment recommendations include promotion of healthy eating patterns and reducing inactivity.
- Obesity and overweight are easier and less costly to prevent than to treat. Adopting healthy dietary and physical activity habits early in life is most effective.